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Abstract and Keywords

The clock has long been a social technology, or a way of authorizing a singular source to propel collective activity. This chapter explores whether this social function continues in quite the same way in the wake of digital technology. It investigates the particular role of the clock in the workplace—how a predictable relationship to time accrued value for The Organization as an institutional form. The chapter traces the history of the clock, from factories to the contemporary digital workplace, asking how new technologies have changed the status of the clock as a way of organizing labour and productivity.

Keywords: clock, temporality, embodiment, labour, technology, organization, optimization

IN Western culture, the clock is the standard object used to coordinate and manage time.[1] The word ‘clock’ derives from the Latin word for bell, and the ringing of bells in central clock towers provided one of the first examples of time-based synchronicity for villagers. The clock has long been a social technology, a way of authorizing a singular source of information to propel collective activity. In this chapter, our interest is in exploring whether this social function continues in quite the same way in the wake of digital technology. We investigate the particular role of the clock in the workplace—how a predictable relationship to time accrued value for The Organization as an institutional form. Beginning with the stopwatch of Frederick W. Taylor, and continuing in the time and motion camera adopted by Frank and Lillian Gilbreth, a rotating arm on the face of a dial has been the standard visual gesture marking the passing of time, and thus, the fluctuations of wealth in the dominant logic of capitalism. Over consistent manifestations of management thought, workers’ productivity has been regarded as a performance to be timed, or an athletic endeavour to be recorded and improved upon (Sloterdijk, 2013). Just as in sports, individuals have been encouraged to see their work as a personal endeavour that can be optimized under the training discipline of the clock. Factory hands and secretaries populated the Gilbreths’ industrial films, acting as models for speed-enhancing techniques. But the clock also reflects the more abstract tedium of the office workday. Our imagination of modern work is strongly associated with the notion of ‘9-to-5’. The

clock is at the heart of these normative frameworks governing bodies and their labours. Yet its role in the organization of work is changing with the influence of new technologies.

Consider the slogan that hangs from a high-rise in downtown Manhattan, marking the location of on-demand office space provider, WeWork. ‘Thank God It’s Monday’ reads the banner—a humorous take on the cube-dweller’s relief at the arrival of Friday (p. 96) and the weekend. The clock measuring work time is being rendered obsolete by WeWork’s original user base: the freelancer, the contract dependent consultant seeking ‘a community of creatives’ to share the costs and fluctuating emotions of an independent career.[2] For these professionals, the idea that work might be limited to set hours or schedules appears laughably outdated. Commitment to work is not marked by long hours or physical proximity to a boss, but by passion. Advertising for gig economy platform Fiverr evokes this sensibility with its image of a thin young woman claiming ‘lack of sleep’ as her ‘drug of choice’ (Scott, 2017). Such visual aesthetics embody Steve Jobs’ imperative for the iPhone generation: ‘Love what you do’ (Tokumitsu, 2015).

The ‘do what you love’ mantra is a symptom suggesting the clock’s social role coordinating schedules may be fading. The idea of limiting work hours makes little sense for those chasing more than one ‘gig’ at a time to make up for insufficient pay. Across the United States and Europe, growing numbers of contingent workers find themselves unable to access the benefits of predictable work, or the labourist ideal of the eight-hour day (Huws, 2014; Manyika et al., 2016). People who were once ‘on the clock’ or ‘punching in’ to a physical workplace are now being replaced by ‘self-starters’ who must be capable of managing time for themselves. The fixed workspaces of modernity have given way to new ways of measuring time, presence, and productivity beyond physical location. Within this altered landscape, the centralized bell or whistle at day’s end is a mythical holdover; indeed being in sync with others may risk individual creativity or the flow of innovation. The clock is present in more discreet or concealed ways, integrated into fitness trackers, software systems, and other wearable appendages organizing workloads and schedules. As we notice the clock’s changing historical, cultural, and technical forms, we begin to realize the significance of its role in ensuring enrolment in collective endeavours.

The Clock through Time

Media theorist Marshall McLuhan presciently enumerated the effects of media technologies like clocks on the human psyche and body: ‘The clock dragged man out of the world of seasonal rhythms and recurrence, as effectively as the alphabet had released him from the magical resonance of the spoken word and the tribal trap’ (McLuhan, 1964: 155). The seasons and their associated patterns of night and day had provided social cues (as did women’s reproductive cycles, upon which experience McLuhan is silent): sunrise and sunset marked the beginning and end of much activity. The sundial offered a way of mediating this relationship to the rhythms of the sun and its shadows. The pocket watch created the sensation of holding time in your hand; keeping (p. 97) time, as it were. Electric light brought new opportunities for measuring and utilizing time. Thanks to lamps, reading

and writing at night became viable, as did commercial activities and sporting events. Night no longer automatically meant the cessation of work or the inevitability of rest. As McLuhan notes, however, the clock itself has specific far-reaching effects. Its dynamics broke the day into functional moments, providing a credentialing force with objective authority. The clock's legitimacy as a scientific measure held all the colonial biases of territorial conquest ably captured in McLuhan's reference to the 'tribal trap'.

The clock in the town square, factory, or classroom produced a different sociality than the personal watch. Social understandings of time also changed in scale. Jimena Canales (2016) traces how features in clock design had specific consequences. In the 1850s, clocks were able to recognize a tenth of a second. Canales writes of the day in 1972 when all clocks were shortened to institute agreed upon metrics. The new reliance on atomic time would have lasting cultural significance, as time no longer needed to be calibrated to daylight and the seasons. Rather than completely dispensing with the established calendar or readjusting it, scientists settled on the concept of the leap year. Clocks, rather than human routines and the signals of the natural world, determined time.

In the 1880s, railroad companies broke the North American landscape into four distinct time zones, ending confusion over the proliferation of local times. The telegraph helped to bridge these new expansions across human scales of perception. James Carey demonstrates how standardized time was built on these novel technologies. Standard time meant that clocks across the country chimed together (Carey, 2009: 17). The telegraph, along with standardized time, united futures markets in Chicago and San Francisco, making the world seem that much smaller. The annihilation of time and space promised by the telegraph prefigured McLuhan's twentieth-century global village. It impacted burgeoning capitalist markets as much as train schedules and it affected how people imagined their larger communities and nations.

The Clock as Management Accomplice

Charlie Chaplin's classic 1936 film, *Modern Times*, maps the factory's temporal logics, the comings and goings of commuters and their management by a variety of clocks, bells, and whistles. The film shows how factory gears, including those of the clock, encase, manipulate, and even suffocate the individual worker and foreman alike. Clock time is the objective force indicating when to up and down tools, and at what pace, organizing production so each minute of what, a decade prior, in 1926, Henry Ford had instituted as the forty-hour week, was as silently, and predictably productive as the next.

A founding tension of The Organization has been the clock's dual role as management accomplice and worker's salvation. Supervisors use the clock to maximize the output of the firm, while employees exploit its political potential to determine the maximum number of hours tolerated. The brief pact between these objectives played out in the (p. 98) years of welfare capitalism, where pioneers such as Ford instituted just the right number of hours' leisure to enjoy the commodities workers produced in assembly plants. The turning point in these endeavours to yoke employer and employee interests through the clock came

with business interest in individual psychology. This early work, carried out by the likes of human factors engineer Lillian Gilbreth, anticipated the link between productivity and athleticism—that is, workers' personal compulsion to demonstrate their accomplishments through labour. With a PhD in psychology—rare for a woman of her time—Gilbreth recognized the value workers gained from producing an archive of achievement. This realization became evident in the films she made with her husband, Frank, who timed workers' tasks against the backdrop of a ticking clock (Figure 9.1). In Gilbreth's account, knowledge of the recording underway created interest in the work, for with it 'comes the possibility of a real, scientific, "athletic contest"' (1914: 33–4). Racing against the clock was a way of creating self-esteem. Gilbreth's articulation of individual outputs with the moral stimulus of self-improvement is the framework through which management regimes encouraged workers to plan and progress their careers for decades.

Figure 9.1 Still from the Original Films of Frank B. Gilbreth

(Image from https://archive.org/details/OriginalFilm)

Today, the celebration of speed has revitalized sociological inquiry (Wajcman and Dodd 2017). Many theorists speculate on the ways that time itself has shifted with the hypermediated digital age. Scholars and social critics have noticed a general compressing of time. Individuals feel 'pressed for time', according to Judy Wajcman (2015). Meanwhile Jonathan Crary (2013) links the birth of 24/7 news and work to the end of sleep. In this view, the homogeneous time of modernity is gone, and with it, the promise (p. 99) of rest. We have 'sleep' mode for our devices, and 'snooze' options for notifications. Our digital objects buzz faintly in the background rather than stopping entirely. They sleep and snooze, but there are fewer instances where technologies abide by an on/off switch. This is a poignant metaphor for the pressing, accelerated way humans are expected to live under late capitalism.

The idea of accelerationism is closely associated with the technology hub of Silicon Valley, which seeks ever-faster solutions to social problems. Accelerationism is also a liberation theology proposed by radical progressives like Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams (2015),

who are convinced that speeding up technological progress will free humanity from the shackles of the clock.[3] Escaping the drudgery of desk jobs and regimented schedules, so the logic goes, people will be able to dream again. Their days will no longer be controlled by hourly concerns but by their own desires and ambitions. As it currently plays out, however, acceleration typically means producing more in less time. Wajcman (2015: 74) suggests this time pressure results from multiple converging elements: an increase in the *volume* of work expected of employees; an increase in *temporal disorganization* as worker and workplace lose their innate proximity; and the phenomenon of *temporal density*. There is an intensification of job function when multitasking and moving between different projects becomes ingrained. The clock was originally used by Taylor and the Gilbreths to measure one specific job, broken down to individual pieces (what the Gilbreths termed, in a spin on their own name, 'therbligs'). Now the psychological toll of windows, tabs, and feeds filtering information through devices all at the same time—on top of the hectic pace of meeting-heavy workplace cultures, where software programs schedule back-to-back meetings with no breaks for biological or emotional needs—culminates as a feeling of perennial context switch. Productivity is sought and measured in spite of work's immaterial nature: new technologies and platforms for labour evade physical and temporal architectures. Rather than sitting in cubicles watching the clock, people work remotely from home, coffee shops, or hybrid co-working spaces. The flexible workforce tallies emails and phone calls, texts and Slack updates, Google Hangouts, Skype chats and tweets from dawn until dusk and beyond. For those in food delivery, transportation, and other 'taskified' jobs, completing assignments in a limited amount of time is the primary requirement. Restaurant couriers promise your meal in 30 minutes or less, the Lyft app informs riders that a driver is three minutes away, and logistics companies strive for same-day delivery. By saving the consumer time, these business models place the burden on workers both to keep pace and to manage how they experience time (Sharma, 2014). Meanwhile, the personal logistics challenges of disaggregated workers take place at the behest of centralized scheduling software products that are owned and operated by global firms (Rossiter, 2016). We struggle to place limits on labour time. The role of the clock in providing a recognized and adequate record of work feels wholly inadequate. In the **(p. 100)** decentralized, secular organization neither the clock tower nor the church bell serves the function of ceasing activity. The digital economy does not guarantee freedom from the clock for all.

The clock was the primary index of alienated labour when employees relied on companies to organize their commitments. As the name implies, 'welfare' capitalism instituted clock time as the trade-off for securing predictable income, vacation days, and other temporal benefits. But as the number of middle-class employees continues to dwindle in North America and European states alike, few are able to negotiate with the employers and protocols now dictating productive labour time. Monday holds less significance when the majority of the workforce is no longer enjoying, let alone being disciplined by a 9-to-5 schedule. To imagine Monday morning as the start of the work week seems almost quaint in an age when work happens *around* the clock and around the world.

Union organizers at the turn of the last century campaigned on the human right to have eight hours for work, eight hours for sleep, and eight hours for leisure. This organization of time was thought to offer respite from constant toil, providing a universal regulatory framework for waged labour. But the clock loses resonance as an organizational tool when individuals are encouraged to welcome the freedom they have to keep their own time. It is not so much that workers are no longer subjected to the whims of the clock, but they are all on slightly different work schedules, making organizing across sectors all the more difficult. In sum, clock-based measures for productivity, efficiency, and control suited a work world where everyone is on the same beat or schedule. For a substantial chapter in history, the clock provided a unifying force for negotiating the terms of social belonging. This proved crucial for the identity and agency of male breadwinners in particular, whose interests were served by so-called collective bargaining. In the next section, we unpack how the clock as an object defining social time now necessarily entertains a more diverse range of individual relationships, priorities, and rhythms.

The Distributed Clock

In recent years the smart watch represents a fundamental broadening of the clock's original organizing function. No longer simply an object observing the time of day for the purpose of coordinating with others, the digital watch incorporates a variety of software applications to enable further efficiency benefits to owners. On the Apple Watch, a sleep tracker reveals the amount of time spent resting, while an activity monitor counts the number of steps taken each day. The body is made curiously legible through these silent data itineraries. It is not incidental that Apple suffered backlash when it failed to include a seemingly obvious tracking function—a period predictor—with its first release. This small detail reflects something broader about a male-dominated technology industry which regularly risks neglecting the alternative temporalities and concerns of diverse users. Other apps already track ovulation and physical signs of (p. 101) fertility such as body temperature. Awareness of the owner's intimate movements adds value and intrigue to times of the day that may otherwise remain oblique and unscrutinized. This view of time also inspires gamification: can the owner get in 1,000 more steps that day or optimize their sleep cycle to include an extra hour of REM?

Beyond the watch, wearable technologies offer extensions of the clock's productivity premise, creating affective attunement with the context of activity. Wearable sensors such as the Thync electromagnetic patch monitors brain activity through EEG sensors. Like the Apple Watch, Thync can diagnose and optimize human activity by creating subtle 'energy' infusions that prepare users for the ups and downs of long and emotionally demanding mental labour. According to the product website:

> The fundamental mechanism of action centers on modulating cranial and spinal nerve pathways using a combination of targeted electrode placement and proprietary transdermal electrical neuromodulation waveforms. These nerve pathways

synapse with key brainstem nuclei involved in modulating stress levels, mood, and sleep cycles.

These increasingly mainstream techniques dedicated to personal well-being are also engaged in producing professional job *fitness* through wearable devices (Gregg, 2018). As such, they continue the idea of athleticism first introduced through the clock and the stopwatch in the workplace. Rather than organizing time for collective use or interests, however, the personal address of these technologies individualizes everyday experience to tiny self-management moments. The varied activities of a typical day come to be witnessed and recorded on the same logic of the corporate clock, which always has the efficiencies of the enterprise in mind.

The biorhythms of digital trackers insulate workers from collective thought and action regarding the organization of labour and its limits. Collectivity is re-imagined as inward facing; a personal dataset to be harvested. Accumulating the body's daily record of activity, users can determine how they measure up in relation to others. In these ways, the clock becomes a distributed object. Individual tracking devices provide a platform for users to summon a sense of their own coherence from many private data streams. The clock is less definitive in determining one's relationship to the social so much as it is a mode of perfecting an enhanced relationship to oneself.

After the Clock: Organization Unbound

If the clock has most often acted as an index of shared time, stitching together imagined communities, it may no longer be the best measure of work or accomplishment in a digital economy. The clock still organizes time when work takes place in flexible environments. (p. 102) But what has changed is the sense of human agency behind assessments of labour expenditure and value. As so many ridesharing drivers and activists now realize, it is impossible to argue with an algorithm in the effort to claim labour rights. As technological innovations impact the experience of work, then, our tools for measuring (and therefore limiting it) must shift as well. Workers who are folding together precarious contracts and non-continuing work opportunities cannot lay claim to predictable time off in the same way that elite workers might (Perlow, 2012). Instead, they are challenged to experiment with new techniques for organizing the activities of their lives beyond the 'hegemony of clock time' (Adkins, 2009). Productivity apps are a common method to manage time and energy in short bursts and create a semblance of order (Gregg, 2015). There is a certain pleasure to tracking one's progress and meeting self-imposed miniature deadlines (How much can I write in this ten-minute window? If I finish this paragraph, will my laptop let me check Twitter?). Software services like the ironically named 'Freedom' or the digital Pomodoro timer promise to maximize productivity by breaking the continuous workday into segments. Productivity tools can block email to facilitate concentration or scold us for writing too long without moving. Output might be measured in words rather than minutes. Apps act as clock bosses, forcing us to focus. By complying, we can avoid reprimand and even see a kitten.[4] The Apple Watch does not just idly measure and track,

but it physically taps users whose heart rates suddenly go up, reminding them to breathe. Apps for health and well-being aim to build space for meditation, contemplation, and rest in the course of the day. These are all methods of recalibrating the body and mind to accommodate the constant cycle of work that escapes clock measure. For precariously employed workers, these efforts in time manipulation occur on a short-term horizon that helps to offset thoughts of an unknown future.

In the shift from the stopwatch and factory clock to the wearable smart device, we might ask: what social infrastructure is lost? Which new media objects will guide our energy expenditure in workplaces of the future, and how can they encourage collective thinking? As workers are told to do more in less time, and focus on output rather than the number of hours spent toiling, what does the clock continue to do?

One way of reading our chapter is to conclude in gig economies based on event time, the organizing technology of labour and measure is no longer the clock, but the sensor. The GPS tracker issues coordinates for bodies to assemble just as the EEG sensor assists the brain with affective attunement. The clock is a not a singular object like a bell tower, but a distributed instrument embedded with predetermined efficiency protocols. Keeping time is less a means of counting or records but a way of setting expectations for the efficient delivery of people and things. Clocks are prospective guides for our activities and ambitions, a way of pacing ourselves in relation to the demands of a day. These activities are of course not simply work related. Reminders or alerts on our devices can help us with all kinds of everyday duties, from the smart speaker timing the dinner (p. 103) cooking to the UPS package charting its way to the front door. As the Internet of Things takes shape, objects like coffee makers, garages, and heating systems may all follow schedules according to sensors that monitor temperature and movement. Beyond the clock and its ticking dial, there are many ways that intelligent ‘things’ will continue to produce rhythm and order in our lives.

Conclusion: Mediating Life and Labour beyond the Clock

In the broadest sense, the clock has been a way of ensuring synchronicity in the endeavours we attempt collectively. It remains a material artefact representing an entire constellation of ideologies regarding time, space, and productivity. In the examples we’ve shown in this chapter—the watch and the sensor—the temporality first introduced by the clock perverts this collective intent. Personal timers and trackers help isolated individuals reacquaint themselves with internal signals. The efficiency logic embedded in the clock even turns out to be a way of removing the worker from social entanglement or reciprocity. This prompts the question: are productivity apps and engineered smart spaces the only alternatives to the hegemony of clock time?

Clock as a mediating technology of organization

The difference between time management in the organizational era—defined by to-do lists, clock time, and a highly gendered division of labour—and time management in the network era—where employees at all levels are equally responsible for their productivity—is the suspension of a clock-based ontology. The self-sufficient worker downloading time management apps today takes on the imperative of productivity despite the generalized lack of employment and thus temporal security. In the move from clock time to event-based labour, entrepreneurial workers are expected to provide their own social welfare to withstand surges in labour demand and supply. Table 9.1 foregrounds the material difference this makes to the aspiration of time management when digitized organization, and not *The* Organization, determines the experience of time.

Table 9.1 From clock time to logistical networks

	Productivity	**Logistics**
objective	Complete	Coordinate
resource	Tool	Provision
time	Measured	Anticipated
hours	Clocked	Billed
location	Fixed	Distributed
asset	Sold	Circulated
data	Stored	Synched
loyalty	Firm	Network
power	Enterprise	Worker

Table first published in Melissa Gregg, *Counterproductive: Time Management in the Knowledge Economy* (2018), reproduced by permission of Duke University Press

Each section of the table considers a vector of value that The Organization's time once affirmed. Escaping the enterprise, today's worker is free to organize herself according to the terms of her own trade and schedule. The ongoing expectation of task and project management is the condition of workplace flexibility which favours some more than others. Meanwhile the reciprocal benefits of employee/employer, now exhausted, occasion a shift to the temporalities and nodes of loyalty provided by the network.[5]

(p. 104) Optimistically, we might venture that an awareness of alternative temporalities will improve the reach and appeal of chronopolitics. This means defining time in terms that suit the needs of many people—workers and otherwise—whose schedules are not well served by The Organization. Our initial attempt to sketch the coordinates of labour in a period of schedule decentralization is intended to provoke further examples of worker-ist vocabularies in the digital era. Mobile and sensor technologies reconfigure not just the location but also the time of value-generating activity. Right now, the currency of data flows dictates which content and reputations gain velocity and power. These factors suggest the futility of maintaining sole allegiance to clock time if workers are to flourish together in a new temporal field. All of us stand to benefit from better technologies of organization to set an appropriate pace for an 'always on' world.

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Notes:

([1]) While this chapter focuses on Western iterations of the clock, a growing body of work is devoted to understanding alternative temporalities of measure and value, including indigenous and queer orientations. See Rifkin (2017) and Bean (2016) for indicative examples.

([2]) WeWork changed its key marketing slogan from 'a community of creatives' in 2016. More recently, the website uses the phrase 'Be the founder of your life'—reflecting a more individuated address for its on-demand office services.

([3]) Benjamin Noys critiques the ideology in his 2014 book, noting how past accelerationist fantasies were also associated with fascism and misogyny. Kathi Weeks (2011) provides a radical feminist account of a possible post-work society.

([4]) See the 'Write or Die' app https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/write-or-die/id476458361?mt=8 or 'Written? Kitten!' http://writtenkitten.co/.

([5]) Even outside the workplace, Natasha Dow Schüll describes how personal routines of self-inventory and self-adjustment afforded by technology provide individuals 'the opportunity to cultivate … an attitude of subjective equanimity in the face of uncertainty' (2016: 556). In her analysis of online gamblers, the particular quality of composure long-term players develop to avoid the pitfalls of emotional involvement appears to equip them with a broader subjective 'readiness' to withstand and endure everyday life.

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